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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 002174

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, SEMEP, PPD, AND IPA; NSC FOR  
SHAPIRO/KUMAR; JOINT STAFF FOR LTGEN SELVA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [CASC](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: WEST BANK SETTLERS FEEL "BETRAYED" BY NETANYAHU

REF: A. JERUSALEM 2130

[1](#)B. TEL AVIV 2590

Classified By: Acting Principal Officer Greg Marchese  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. In the wake of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's November 25 announcement of a 10-month suspension of new construction in West Bank settlements, Post contacts in the settler community voiced distrust of the GOI, anger at the USG, and a determination to resist GOI efforts to monitor and enforce the moratorium. Long-time observers noted that despite the apocalyptic tone of some settler leaderships, the tenor of the response was in many respects predictable, and was at least in part designed to extract a political or financial "price tag" from the GOI. Private comments from settler leaders largely mirrored their public statements, and focused on their "betrayal" by Netanyahu and the unacceptability of any restriction on settlement growth. However, one leader told Post that his community could tolerate the terms of the moratorium if the GOI was willing to make minor adjustments to its terms. End Summary.

#### SKIRMISHES BETWEEN WEST BANK SETTLERS, INSPECTORS

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[1](#)2. (C) On December 2, despite GOI outreach to the settler community leadership and suggestions by GOI officials that exceptions to the moratorium would be considered and in some cases granted, local media reported recurrent clashes between Civil Administration inspectors and West Bank settlers throughout the day. Israeli press reported that police intervened to prevent violence between inspectors and settlers in Elon Moreh and Beit Aryeh, and that a total of six settlers -- including Avi Naim, mayor of Beit Aryeh -- were arrested. Minor injuries were also reported. Gush Etzion mayor Shaul Goldstein told PolOff on December 2, "this (signals) the beginning of the destruction of our community and we won't let that happen. We are a strong community and we won't give into Netanyahu and Obama."

#### SETTLER RHETORIC (STILL) APOCALYPTIC

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[1](#)3. (C) Goldstein, like many Post contacts in the settler community, painted the GOI moratorium policy in dire terms. "If things continue like the last two days," Goldstein warned, "there will be a civil war in Israel. We know what happened in (the former Gaza settlement of) Gush Katif, we know the steps they take -- this is the first step and we won't let (Gush Katif) happen again." Note: the evacuation of Gush Katif settlement in Gaza in 2005 was accompanied by largely peaceful protest, rather than violent resistance. Several Post settler contacts now refer to this a strategic mistake. End note.

14. (C) The heated rhetoric was not universal among our contacts. Rabbi Yaacov Guterman, Mayor of Modi'in Illit, told PolOff on December 3 that he could tolerate enforcement of the ten-month moratorium if certain exceptions already discussed in public by the GOI were implemented. He did not, however, accept that this or any other GOI settlement policy applied to Modi'in Illit, which he termed "a city, not a settlement." He added that for this reason, he had not joined the settler leadership's December 3 meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu, as he "did not want to be associated with Judea and Samaria."

#### SETTLERS FEAR SUSPENSION WILL BE PERMANENT

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15. (C) Some Post contacts also voiced fears that USG pressure will force the GOI to move from suspending construction to evacuating pre-existing large settlements contiguous to the Green Line (as opposed to isolated outposts considered illegal by the GOI, which have long been slated for evacuation). "We don't believe a word, we don't think Netanyahu can stand against the U.S. or E.U. -- we know the pressure those countries can push," Gush Etzion Mayor Goldstein told PolOff on December 2.

16. (C) David Ha'ivri, spokesperson for the Shomron Regional Council, told PolOff separately that settlers are concerned the moratorium will continue beyond its scheduled expiration, because concessions by the GOI in the peace process context often become the starting point for the next phase of negotiations. "A lot of people are personally affected by the (suspension). They've invested time and resources in the

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housing process, applying for permits, paying fees, living in caravans while waiting for their houses to be built -- and now that the entire process is frozen, they are frustrated, and concerned for their future."

17. (C) "People are sitting on packed bags," said Rahel, a Gush Katif evacuee and Nitzan resident, on December 1. "My daughter, Tamar, called yesterday, upset. Her neighbor started pouring foundation for an extension of his house, and the army came the next day and broke it apart. I tell her to hold tight, fight, don't let them do to you what they did to us." Tamar is currently living in the West Bank settlement of Maale Mikhmas, according to Rahel.

#### OBSERVERS FIND SETTLER RESPONSE PREDICTABLE

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18. (C) Long-term observers of West Bank settler politics argued that the tenor and tone of the settlement community's response to the GOI announcement was largely predictable, and followed a pattern of past confrontations. Lior Yavne, settler violence researcher for NGO Yesh Din, told PolOff that tactics such as settler efforts to block roads are part of an effort to increase the "price tag" the GOI will incur for the moratorium. He cautioned that it is "too early to tell if violence will escalate, or if it's organized on a wider-level." Lior argued that the level of settler-GOI violence to date has been in line with his expectations.

19. (C) Dror Etkes, Yesh Din settlements monitor, said, "the degree of violence will depend on how far the government will go to enforce the suspension. The settlers are blocking roads and gates -- how far the police will go to counter that, that will give the settlers the opportunity to retaliate." Etkes added that the settlers' goal is to be cast in the role of the victim, to avoid losing support among mainstream Israelis. For that reason, they are unlikely to initiate violence unless the GOI escalates its enforcement efforts.

110. (C) "The response is certainly not surprising," Gershom Gorenberg, Israeli writer and author of a definitive text on

the settlement movement, told PolOff. "There's a direct relationship between moves by the government and the level of violence. Settlers are talking in terms of creating confrontation -- they want to show they are not going along with the freeze, so they will build things. If the government intends to enforce the freeze and tear down structures, then the crowds will come in -- we've seen this before."

#### SETTLERS PROMISE MORE CONFRONTATIONS TO COME

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¶11. (C) In general, Post contacts promised that GOI attempts to enforce the moratorium would be met by confrontation -- but not, most suggested, by organized violence. "The demonstrations come and go," said Yisrael "Winky" Medad, Shilo resident. "We hear about inspectors or police coming, then we respond. If they come to Shilo, I will be out there, blocking the entrance." Ruchie Avital, Ofra resident, told PolOff, that protests and lobbying efforts were being organized at the grassroots level, and "there are no plans to use violence."

#### DESPITE SUSPENSION, PLANNING CONTINUES

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¶12. (C) According to settler and NGO contacts, settler leaders continue to plan for future demonstrations and illegal construction. Medad told PolOff on December 2 that settlers from across the West Bank will meet in Ofra on December 5 to discuss the current situation and plan additional demonstrations, including a Jerusalem protest in the week of December 7.

¶13. (C) Hagit Ofra of Peace Now told PolOff on December 2 that despite Netanyahu's moratorium announcement, GOI planning for new settlement construction appears to be continuing. On November 30, Ofra observed, "there was an advertisement for two tenders from the Ministry of Housing, looking for someone to manage the planning and implementation of housing projects in Efrat, Maale Adumim, and Beitar Illit. We're still monitoring what this means, but it seems like they are preparing for construction when the 10 months is over."

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